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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RPO DUBAI 000474

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV IR PHUM

SUBJECT: IRAN: GOVERNMENT CLASHES WITH PROTESTORS ON 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF AMERICAN EMBASSY SEIZURE

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CLASSIFIED BY: Alan Eyre, Director, Iran Regional Presence Office, DOS.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: First reports from Iran indicate that security forces moved aggressively against 'Green Path' opposition supporters who took to the streets in a bid to co-opt the government-sanctioned commemoration of the 1979 seizure of the American Embassy in Tehran on November 4, with anecdotal reports of "hundreds" of arrests. In what appears to be the most serious clashes between protestors and government forces since late July, uniformed and plain-clothes forces used tear gas and batons to disperse demonstrators at many sites throughout Tehran. Unconfirmed reports that security forces were firing live rounds at protestors saturated blogs tracking the day's events, as did reports that scores of people were injured.

¶2. (C) SUMMARY CONT: Dispelling rumors defeated presidential candidate and leading government critic Mehdi Karroubi had been arrested, Karroubi's son told Radio Farda that the 72-year old cleric was injured slightly after security forces fired tear gas at him and a crowd of supporters in Hafteh Tir Square in North Tehran. Western media sources reported that Mir Hossein Mousavi was prevented from leaving his home by government forces, but may have issued a statement urging his supporters to 'remain in the streets.' Though participation levels are not yet clear, video footage posted to the Internet and eyewitness accounts indicate that groups of hundreds or a few thousand protestors convened in many locations in Tehran and several other cities, including Shiraz and Isfahan. Witnesses also reported a heavy security presence across Tehran, with riot police stationed in key public venues from earlier morning. Unconfirmed blog reports indicate the government may have disrupted mobile phone networks and increased filtering of oppositionist websites. Meanwhile, Iranian state television broadcast the government's official rally in front of the former site of the American Embassy, which was attended by "thousands" according to the state news agency. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (C) Due to the government's virtual media blackout, it is too early to have a full sense the scale of the November 4 clashes between government opponents and security forces. However, initial reports indicate that the regime made good on its threats to "confront" unauthorized gatherings, reverting to aggressive tactics to disperse demonstrators. From early morning, reformist websites and blogs carried reports of a heavy security presence throughout Tehran, particularly at the scenes of earlier clashes such as Haft-e Tir Square. As demonstrations

got underway mid-morning, eyewitnesses posted accounts of "hundreds" and "thousands" gathered at various locales. Later in the day, a leading oppositionist website posted photos showing several thousand green-clad demonstrators marching in Tehran.

¶4. (C) Video already posted to the Internet corroborates that opposition leader Mehdi Karrubi, one of the most strident critics of the current government, participated in an anti-government demonstration. Dispelling a flurry of rumors that Karrubi had been beaten and arrested by security forces, Karrubi's son told Radio Farda that supporters had evacuated the 72-year old cleric after police fired a canister of tear gas at him. According to Mohammad Taghi Karrubi, his father was "slightly burned" by the tear gas. Separately, a Western reporter based in Dubai told IRPO that a "reliable journalist" reported that security forces surrounded Mir Hossein Mousavi's house in the early morning to prevent him from joining the rallies. As yet, no reports have emerged that neither Mousavi nor former President Khatami joined opposition supporters in the streets.

¶5. (C) Not surprisingly, university campuses across Iran appear to have been the focal points of much unrest. Many, as yet unconfirmed, reports indicate that security forces cordoned off the University of Tehran in an attempt to prevent students from leaving campus to join protests. Additional unconfirmed reports, some seemingly corroborated by amateur video posted to the Internet, allege anti-government demonstrations at Sharif University, Khaje Nasir University in Tehran, and many branches of Islamic Azad University.

¶6. (C) Meanwhile, state media reported that tens of thousands

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participated in the in the day's 'official' ceremonies at the site of the former US Embassy in Iran. The participants chanted "Death to America" and "Death to Israel," among other anti-Western and pro-Khamenei slogans. Former Majlis Speaker Haddad Adel spoke at the ceremony and continued the anti-American rhetoric. He said, "Iran's nation will change its opinion towards the US on the day the US changes its cruel behavior" and that, "despite slogans on support of democracy, freedom and human rights, the US has always backed dictator governments." (NOTE: Such rhetoric is typical for the November 4 demonstrations. END NOTE.)

¶7. (C) COMMENT: After a relatively muted response to the opposition's show of strength on Qods Day (September 18), this time the government appears to have reverted to the use of force to put down those who would defy its authority. We don't yet know whether this tactical shift is a response to nervousness over increased university student participation in demonstrations (Qods Day happened before the semester started), or the regime's exasperation at the persistence of the 'Green Path' opposition's unexpected staying power. END COMMENT.  
EYRE